DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 251 379 SO 016 071

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TITLE Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad.
INSTITUTION National Women's History Project, Santa Rosa, CA.
PUB DATE 82
NOTE 7p.; Kit containing game board, dice and player pieces, and this guide available from the National Women's History Project, Box 3716, Santa Rosa, CA 95402 ($6.50).
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Biographies; *Black History; Black Studies; Educational Games; Elementary Education; Instructional Materials; Learning Activities; *Slavery; United States History; Units of Study
IDENTIFIERS Freedom; *Tubman (Harriet); *Underground Railroad

ABSTRACT

Suitable for elementary level students, this study unit helps increase students' comprehension of the risks involved in a black person's flight from slavery and of Harriet Tubman's success in leading more than 300 slaves to freedom via the Underground Railroad. Five activity suggestions are followed by a reading on the life of Harriet Tubman. Study questions precede a song which may have served as a map and timetable for slaves. The brief document concludes with a list of recommended resources about Harriet Tubman and other related topics. An accompanying game board, which can be ordered from the publisher, leads students through a series of obstacles in their journey from the southern slave states to freedom in the northern United States and Canada. (LH)

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1982

Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad

by Mary Crawford & Mary Ruthsdotter

INTRODUCTION: This study unit will help increase students' comprehension of the trememdous risks involved in a Black person's flight from slavery, and of the bravery of Harriet Tubman, "Moses" of her people. The Underground Railroad was a system of safe places to hide and people to give food and shelter on the slaves' escape to the free states of the North or Canada. Harriet Tubman was a guide along the eastern route of this secret network.

THE GAME:

The game board is printed on stock selected for coloring success with crayons or felt pens. Lamination will increase the game's longevity.

To play, 2-6 players roll the die and advance the number of spaces shown. The object is to finish the game, free in the northern states or Canada. Play continues until all members of the group are safe.

ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS:

1. Stage a re-enactment of Harriet Tubman leading the slaves out of the South. Arrange desks to make a difficult path and litter the floor with crumpled papers to make noise. Have one student act as Harriet Tubman and lead a group of 11 students from a designated area called "South" to one called "Freedom". They must be quiet and follow her directions. Designate a "safe house" space in the middle where they can rest. Darken the room. The other children close their eyes and listen very carefully. If anyone is caught (heard), they all have to go back to slavery.

2. After reading about Harriet Tubman, the physical risks she took and her dedication to help other slaves, have students discuss the concept of strength: what it is, whether it is a trait of females or males only, the particular qualities that are present in a strong person. Name 5 men and 5 women in history and discuss what qualities indicated their strength. Who are some people today who exhibit strength? What physically handicapped people today are examples of strength?

3. Construct shoe-box dioramas about a Black family's escape from slavery along the route of the Underground Railroad. Remind your students that it was only safe to travel at night from safe house to safe house, following Harriet Tubman or the Big Dipper constellation.

4. Encourage a group of students to prepare a report on the life of Harriet Tubman in the form of a skit, to be presented to children in a lower grade. Try writing the script from the perspective of a child moving carefully with her/his family along the Underground Railroad. How did she/he feel? What did the family take with them? How did they travel? Why were they taking such a risk?

5. Assign further research on the roles of Harriet Tubman during and after the Civil War. How was she rewarded for her life's work?

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Harriet Tubman, the Moses of Her People

This is the story of Harriet Tubman, a black slave who escaped to freedom in the North, went back to the South and led hundreds of slaves to freedom on the Underground Railroad, a secret system of places to hide and people to give food and shelter on the way North.

It was a spring day on a plantation in Maryland in the early 1800's. A group of slaves were picking corn under the watchful eye of an overseer. Suddenly, one of the slaves started running away from the field. The overseer shouted, cracked his whip and began chasing the man. At the village store the slave was caught and the overseer asked a 13 year old girl to help him hold the slave so he could whip him. Shaking her head "NO," the young girl stepped in front of the overseer, giving the slave a minute to run. Surprised by the sudden obstacle in his way, the overseer lifted a heavy iron weight and threw it, but it missed the running slave and hit the young girl in the head. The girl was Harriet Tubman. The deep scar marked her face for the rest of her life, and the wound gave her periodic sleeping spells throughout her life, reminders of the first of her many brave and defiant acts against slavery.

Harriet Tubman was born in 1820 to slave parents on a Maryland plantation. By the time she was six years old, she was hired out to work on a plantation far away from where she had been born and brought up. With no time to say goodbye to her family, she found herself being carried away in a wagon to weave, set traps and clean for a new master and mistress. But within months she was home again—she had caught measles and was unable to work any longer. Her mother nursed her back to health, and she was again hired out—this time to look after a baby and clean in the home of Miss Susan. Everyday she cleaned and ran errands, and every night the six-year old Harriet rocked the baby. If the baby cried out, Harriet was whipped. She was whipped so often that she had scars on her back for the rest of her life. One day, after several months at Miss Susan's house, Harriet slipped a lump of sugar into her mouth to taste. Miss Susan caught her and reached for the whip, but Harriet jumped and ran. She ran and ran until she was exhausted and fell into a big pigpen where she hid for four days. Eating potato peelings and afraid to sleep, she finally gave up in starvation and exhaustion. With no other place to go, she went back to the plantation. From that time on, Harriet worked in the fields. She worked from morning til night, in the rain, in the summer heat. Her muscles became strong and hard, and she sang as she worked. She listened to the whispered conversations between slaves about freedom in the North and a way to escape called the Underground Railroad.

It took Harriet months to recover from the head wound she received by stepping between the overseer and the escaping field slave. She knew that because she was no longer trusted to obey the overseer, she would be sold. Harriet dreamed of running away. She spent time in the woods with her father learning which of the berries and roots could be eaten. One day as she was working in the fields, a white woman drove by, saw the scar on Harriet's head and carefully told her where she lived in a town called Bucktown. "If you ever need help, Harriet, let me know," she said. Harriet began to make plans. At night she would look up at the sky and at the North Star that she knew would guide her to freedom.

One evening, Harriet walked through the slave quarters singing, "When that old chariot comes, I'm going to leave you, I'm bound for the promised land. Friend, I'm going to leave you." The next morning Harriet and her brothers were missing, and their friends and family understood her song. After two days in the woods, Harriet's brothers turned back and she continued along. Frightened, unsure whether she could trust the white woman's offer of help in Bucktown, Harriet put her trust in God. When she reached the white woman's home, she reached the first stop on the Underground Railroad.

> I had reasoned this out in my mind; there was one of two things I had a right to, liberty or death. If I could not have one, I would have the other; for no man should take me alive. I would fight for my liberty as long as my strength lasted, and when the time came for me to go, the Lord would let them take me.

Hiding in the daytime, and with instructions on how to get to the next station on the Railroad, she moved through the woods at night. The North Star guided her, the food from stations on the Railroad sustained her. When she finally reached Pennsylvania, Harriet Tubman was free!! And as she stepped across that freedom line, she vowed to go back and get her family someday. For a year she worked—as a cook, doing housework, scrubbing floors—and saved her money. There was an office in Philadelphia where escaped slaves came for help and information. Whenever Harriet went there, she saw groups of escaped slaves and never failed to think how miraculous it was that a group of people—sometimes just one, or two, or three—should have had the courage to start off for an unknown destination without food or friends or money, but with only the burning desire to be free.

A year later, Harriet made her first trip to the South to lead her sister, her sister's husband and their two children to freedom. She did not let them know how frightened she was. Her courage, songs and stories of escaped slaves, and descriptions of freedom in the North, sustained and gave strength to others to go on.

A new law was passed, saying that runaway slaves could be captured and returned to their owners in the South. Then Harriet and others were no longer safe in the North. The Underground Railroad was extended to the Canadian border, and Harriet's trips to the South to lead people to freedom became longer and more dangerous.

Harriet Tubman became a legend in the slave cabins of the South. The people called her their "Moses." When they heard the song "Go Down Moses, way down to Egypt Land, And tell Old Pharaoh, to let my people go" sung softly near their cabins, the slaves knew she was there to lead them to freedom. The next morning, several slaves would be missing. Sometimes people became discouraged and frightened on the long trips North, and Harriet would try to encourage them with songs, stories, prayers, and when that didn't work and someone would try to turn back, she would pull out her gun and say "You go on, go on or you die!!" Harriet knew that whoever turned back would be forced to tell about the Underground Railroad, the places they hid and the people who helped them. "We got to go free, or we die."

Harriet Tubman led more than 300 slaves to freedom. Rewards of $12,000 were offered for her capture. She died of old age and lived to see the abolition of slavery in the United States. She used to say proudly, "On my Underground Railroad I never ran my train off the track, and I never lost a passenger."

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Study Questions:

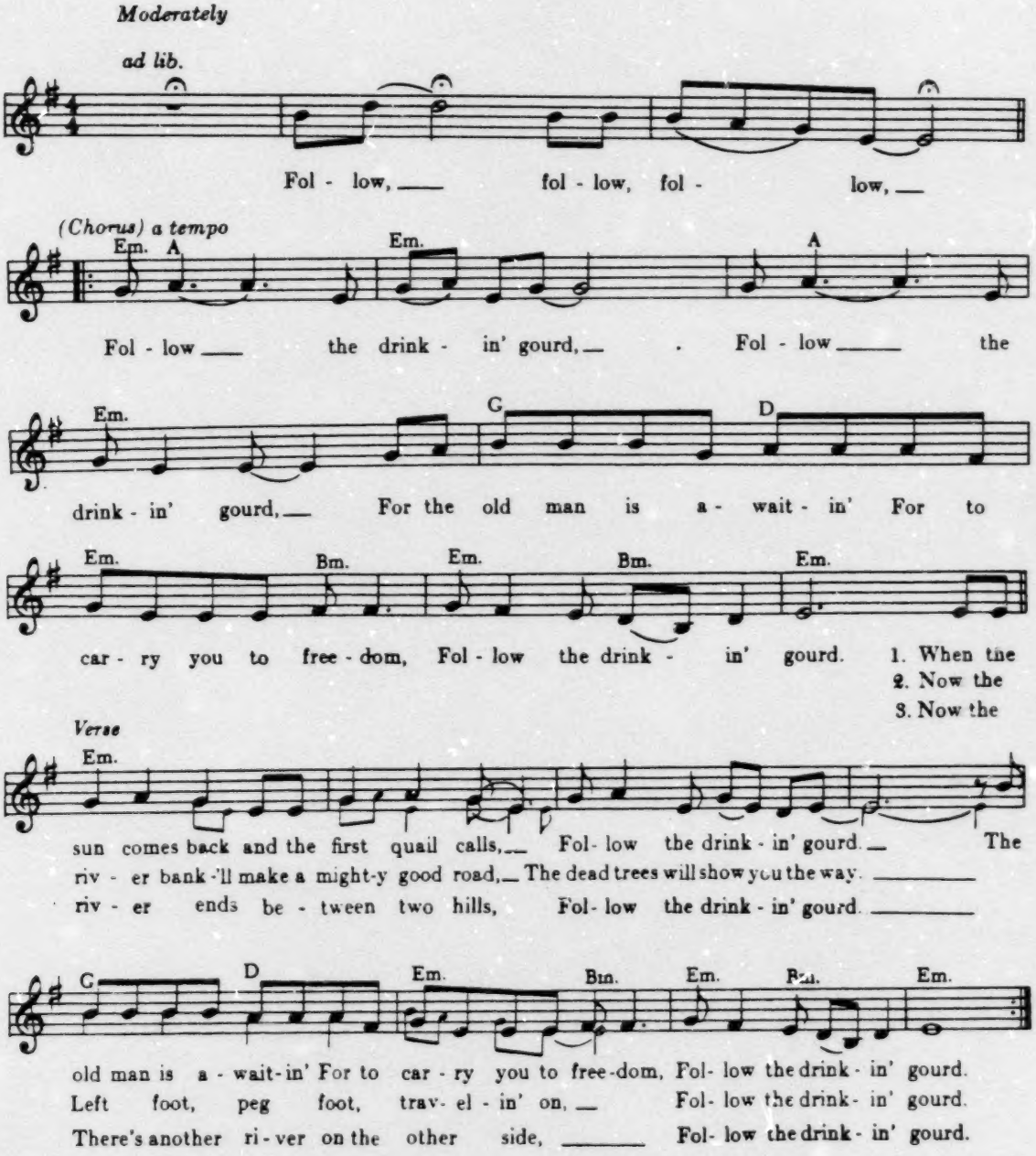
1. What was it that drove Harriet Tubman to escape, and return to the South time and time again to help other slaves escape?

2. Harriet Tubman was both gentle and tough. Describe the methods she used to cover her own fears as she guided slaves on the long and dangerous road to freedom. What methods did she use to bolster up her passengers when they became discouraged and frightened?

3. Why is Harriet Tubman called the "Moses" of her people? What qualities did she have which made her a leader and heroine for all Americans, of all ethnic groups?

4. It was against the law for people to hide escaping slaves. Do you think they did the right thing? What do you think you would do in their situation.?

Follow the Drinking Gourd

Many slaves escaped bondage along the Underground Railroad, a system of secret, safe places to hide and people to give food and shelter on the way to the free states of the North and Canada. This song provided a map and timetable: Follow the Big Dipper, it points the way to the North and freedom!

Moderately
ad lib.
Fol - low, ___ fol - low, fol - low, ___
(Chorus) a tempo
Em. A Em. A
Fol - low ___ the drink - in' gourd, ___ . Fol - low ___ the
Em. G D
drink - in' gourd, ___ For the old man is a - wait - in' For to
Em. Bm. Em. Bm. Em.
car - ry you to free - dom, Fol - low the drink - in' gourd.
1. When the
2. Now the
3. Now the
Verse
Em.
sun comes back and the first quail calls, ___ Fol- low the drink - in' gourd. ___ The
riv - er bank-'ll make a might-y good road, ___ The dead trees will show you the way. ___
riv - er ends be - tween two hills, Fol- low the drink - in' gourd. ___
G D Em. Bm. Em. Bm. Em.
old man is a - wait-in' For to car - ry you to free-dom, Fol- low the drink - in' gourd.
Left foot, peg foot, trav- el - in' on, ___ Fol- low the drink- in' gourd.
There's another ri - ver on the other side, ___ Fol- low the drink - in' gourd.

Recommended Resources About Harriet Tubman

Harriet Tubman: Guide to Freedom

Author: Sam and Beryl Epstein
Publisher: Garrard
Grade levels: 3-6
Date 1968

The frightening circumstances of the Underground Railroad are well described for young readers. Well illustrated, also.

Harriet and the Promised Land

Author: Jacob Lawrence
Publisher: Simon and Schuster
Grade levels: 2-5
Date 1968

The story of Harriet Tubman told in free verse with stylized illustrations.

Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad

Author: Ann Petry
Publisher: Archway
Grade levels: 6-9
Date 1971

Dramatically told story of Tubman's life and work.

The Negro Woman (a 33 r.p.m. record)

Produced by Folkways Records
Available from the National Women's History Week Project
Harriet Tubman is one of the seven Black women from the past whose words are featured on this record.

Black Heritage Series #2 (audio cassette and study booklet)

from Imperial Learning Corp.
P.O. Box 548
Kankakee, IL 60901
Riveting story about her daring life, lively and animated.

Color Me Brown (a coloring book)

from Johnson Publishing Company
820 S. Michigan Avenue
Chicago, IL 60605
One of 29 prominent Black persons presented with a simple biography and equally simple line drawing. (Facial characteristics tend to be shown more European than African)

Recommended Resources for Additional Reading

Mumbet: The Story of Elizabeth Freeman

Author: Harold Felton — Publisher: Dodd, Mead
Grades: 4-8 — Date 1970
A Black slave who gained freedom in 1781 by fighting her case through the Massachusetts courts.

Two Tickets to Freedom: The True Story of Ellen & William Craft

Author: Florence Freedman — Publisher: Simon and Schuster
Grade levels: 4-8 — Date: 1971
Dramatic story of their escape from slavery in disguise, their prosperous life in England and return to the South after the Civil War to open a farm school for their people.

Cowslip

Author: Betsy Haynes — Publisher: Thomas Nelson
Grade levels: 4-8 — Date: 1973
Extremely moving story about a 13-year-old slave sold on the auction block. She moves from fatalism to a determination to live wild and free.

Her Name was Sojourner Truth

Author: Hertha Pauli — Publisher: Avon
Grade levels: 6-9 — Date: 1976
The life of the Black abolitionist crusader and fighter for women's rights, herself born into slavery.

Sojourner Truth

Author: Helen Peterson — Publisher: Garrard
Grade levels: 3-6 — Date: 1972
Reading of her 70-year life will give young readers a tremendous insight into the lives of slaves generally, and of this determined freed slave/abolitionist.

A Woman Against Slavery: The Story of Harriet Beecher Stowe

Author: John A. Scott — Publisher: Crowell
Grade levels: 6-9 — Date: 1978
Well documented account of the life of the abolitionist, writer and feminist, whose work contributed directly to the beginning of the Civil War.

Runaway to Freedom

Author: Barbara Smucker — Publisher: Harper and Row
Grade levels: 4-5 — Date: 1978
Two Mississippi girls try to reach Canada and freedom via the Underground Railroad.

Turning the World Upside Down

Author: William and Patricia Willimon — Publisher: Sandlapper
Grade levels: 6-10 — Date: 1972
The stories of Sarah and Angelina Grimke, southern plantation women who became leaders in the abolitionist movement.